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ABSTRACT

Psycholinguistics, with its emphasis on language processes rather than products, is particularly compelling when applied to the search for underlying connections between reading and writing. One such connection is best stated in the following propositions about writing and learning to write: (1) at no time are the acts of reading and writing as inextricably bound to one another as when a person writes, and (2) when ineffective writers are helped to become conscious of the interactive language process between writing and reading, their writing quickly becomes more expert. Two psycholinguistic concepts used to describe the reading process can be applied to writing instruction, prediction and redundancy. The activity of prediction allows the reader to correctly anticipate the next word, sentence, or paragraph. If there is a sudden change in content, the reader is disturbed. Redundancy is a reader's prior knowledge used to make the above mentioned predictions. During the writing process, a writer must be a reader who tests the predictability of the writing and whether the content conforms to prior knowledge. The effective writer is one who can switch between the role of reader and writer. Dramatic improvement in writing is possible when weak writers are made conscious of the ways that prediction and redundancy work in reading and can apply them to their writing revision process. (HTH)

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The Writer As Conscious Reader

Language is a subject of infinite variety and endless intrigue. Today, perhaps more than in the past, we know enough to know that many mysteries about language remain unsolved and many questions stand unanswered. Today, then, is a particularly exciting time to become immersed in the study of language. Many searches are just beginning, among them the quest for useful connections between writing and reading.

In spite of the seemingly self-evident proposition that reading and writing are reciprocal language acts, relationships between reading and writing have long remained stubbornly resistant to rigorous delineation. True, surface-level parallels have been discussed in some journal articles and form the basis for instruction in some classrooms. But these superficial treatments of the subject are far from satisfactory. One popular approach, for example, attempts to match reading skills with writing skills: a main idea extracted from reading is likened to a topic sentence in writing, paragraph patterns discerned in reading become models for writing, and so forth. Such matchings are too thin to survive beyond the most simple of applications, and, worse, they ignore all that we have come to know about the nature of discourse and the written word. Equally unpromising is a read-and-repeat approach to the study of literature. To ask students merely to rephrase in writing

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(and thereby supposedly come to know) what has been read is inevitably to elicit depressing, passionless prose.

More fruitful connections between writing and reading can be made when we avoid such surface-level parallels and focus instead on a deeper-level analysis of what happens when meaning is created by, and derived from, the written word. On grounds both theoretical and practical, I turn therefore to psycholinguistics, the study of language use as influenced by the psychology of perception and learning. Psycholinguistics, with its emphasis on language processes rather than products, is particularly compelling when applied to the search for underlying relationships between reading and writing.

This paper addresses one specific connection between reading and writing that I have derived from psycholinguistic theories of the reading process, and that I have confirmed with specific teaching strategies in my composition classrooms. That specific connection is best stated in the form of two related propositions about writing and learning to write:

> Proposition I: At no time are the acts of reading and writing as inextricably bound to one another as when a person writes.
>
> Proposition II: When ineffective writers are helped to become conscious of the interactive language process between writing and reading, their writing quickly becomes more expert.

I intend to elaborate in some detail upon these propositions. To do this, I shall, first, explain two central psycholinguistic concepts, prediction and redundancy, used to describe the reading process. Next, I shall draw upon these concepts to discuss Proposition I, given above. Then, I shall explicate successive versions of a student's writing as I explore the classroom applications and implications of Proposition II, given above. My overall purpose is to show that an understanding of the reading process can inform our understanding of the composing process.

The Psycholinguistic Concepts of Prediction and Redundancy

Prediction is a central activity in the reading process. At the word level, the classic example of prediction is: "Once upon a _____." Few native speakers of English would fail to fill the blank with the word "time." The word is easily predicted. Indeed, if someone were to write, "Once upon a throne, a queen sat," the chances are high that many readers would read "time" for "throne," especially if the sentence were embedded in a larger context. Years ago, the Broadway musical Once Upon a Mattress attracted attention with the unexpected "mattress" in its title. And those theatregoers who on the basis of the title made rather bawdy predictions about the story met the unexpected once again: it was based on the fairy tale The Princess and the Pea. Perhaps the best illustration of ongoing prediction at the word level is what proficient readers do when they

get to the end of a page -- they predict what will be the first word on the next page. When their guess does not match what they find, with allowances for semantic substitutes, the readers generally look back to see what went wrong. As Smith explains:

> Prediction is the reason that the brain is not normally overwhelmed by the possible number of alternatives in language; there are actually only very few alternatives in our minds at any one time that we are comprehending what is being said.[1]

Prediction operates also at the level of sentences, paragraphs, chapters or essays, and books. One sentence leads the reader to predict, in general terms at least, what the next sentence will say. If the next sentence brings a sudden shift of content, the reader is jarred.

Jars filled with jam always filled my grandmother's kitchen shelves. STOP. Was that sentence about jars of jam expected? No. You had no way of predicting that I would shift content so abruptly, unless you guessed that I might illustrate the principle of prediction at the sentence and paragraph level by writing something unpredictable. Simply put, then, sentences, paragraphs and larger units of discourse are expected to mirror readers' predictions.

Lest this necessary oversimplification mislead, I hasten to add this disclaimer: reading is a highly complex cognitive process during which layers upon layers of predictions operate concurrently.

Goodman explains some of the complexities of the reading process with his description of sampling, or getting an overall notion of what will be in a text; predicting, or establishing expectations; testing, of checking to see if the expectations are fulfilled; and confirming or disconfirming those expectations.[2] Smith links prediction to comprehension, that all-important concern of readers and teachers of reading, and thus establishes the primacy of setting expectations during the reading process:

> Now at last I can say what I mean by "comprehension." Prediction means asking questions -- and comprehension means getting those questions answered. . . Comprehension is not a quantity, it is a state -- a state of having no unanswered questions.[3]

Redundancy is a second seminal concept in the psycholinguistic model of the reading process. Redundancy, here, refers not to the English handbook notion of needless repetition. Rather, redundancy refers to prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is that which is already in a reader's head. Prior knowledge is needed for proficient reading. The proficient reader brings prior knowledge of many sorts to the printed page. That is, various orthographic, syntactic, and semantic predictions are made by a reader on the basis of his or her prior experience with language. Thus, the first few letters of a long word can clue the reader into the entire word or into a complete phrase ("The book was well wr_____."). The structure of a sentence can

clue a reader to expect a certain part of speech to appear next (can anything but a verb or adverb be inserted here: "If you _____"?). Meaning can clue a reader to expect what word, within a range of synonyms, will come next ("Today, the weather is _____.").

Thus, readers do not rely solely on their visual ability to see the visual information on the page. Rather, they interact with the visual information by using their prior knowledge -- that is, by relying on redundancy. As Smith reminds us:

> Because of the brain's information-processing limitations, readers must make use of all available forms of redundancy in written language . . . to reduce their dependence upon visual information from print.[4]

Readers cannot look at each letter separately if they are to read well. They must be able to read in chunks, speeding up when the information is easily derived, and slowing down when the material is too new.

To summarize: redundancy is a major source of information for the reader. Redundancy helps a reader make predictions. Making predictions is the basis of reducing uncertainty and thereby of achieving comprehension. Reading, then, is clearly not a passive activity, when viewed from a psycholinguistic perspective. It is a dynamic process of interaction between what is on the printed page and what the reader brings to the printed page. These concepts have important implications for writers.

Relating Reading to Writing

Proposition I: At no time are the acts of reading and writing as inextricably bound to one another as when a person writes.

To write is to communicate, to create something to be read. But much before the writing has become a product, a piece to be read by its intended audience, the writing is an exploration. Writing is, as Emig argues, a unique mode of learning.[4] In writing, Elbow demonstrates, "meaning is not what you start out with but what you end up with."[5]

During this discovery process, the writer must serve as his or her own first reader, his or her initial audience. This is a private, one-person partnership, a facile slipping back and forth between the roles of writer and reader. The writer is self-reader, the helpmate who sees what has been written and checks it against intention. Here the acts of writing and reading are interwoven into a rich fabric of language use. They are bound to each other inextricably. Witness Mandel's description of his writing process:

> After I have written, I reread instantly -- this process happens constantly during the writing process -- making alterations and judging (i.e., editing).[6]

Serving as self-reader is no easy task. The self-reader must be able to imagine what it would be like for someone else to read what has been written. Flower reminds us just how difficult this is:

> Taking the perspective of another mind is also a demanding cognitive operation. It means holding not only your own knowledge network but someone else's conscious attention and comparing them.[7]

When put in the place of an outside reader, the writer must be able to step back and get a fresh sense of what another reader will confront. Here the writer is more reader than writer. The writer is thus transformed into an editor, for the writer must now rearrange, reword, and proofread as needed. Such role switching between writer and self-reader goes on continuously during the composing process. Indeed, the linear model of the composing process (pre-writing, writing, editing) does not suffice to explain the network of recursive loops and branches which describe the complexities of writing.

An effective writer knows unconsciously the rhythms of his or her composing, and therefore knows when to pause, when to plunge on, and when to reshape ideas and remold words to fit intention. An effective writer can easily switch roles, can easily become an effective self-reader. This writer can effortlessly move back and forth between allowing the words to flow and editing the words for best effect. An ineffective writer, on the other hand, is unable to switch roles readily. This writer often writes without rereading. Or if this writer does move into the role of self-reader, the inter-

action with the text is so intimate as to preclude the notion of an outside reader as audience. This writer assumes connections that are not obvious, sees relationships that are not fully explained, and over-condenses material that is far from self-evident. Such a writer is not an effective self-reader. Indeed, such a writer is often a weak reader altogether.

Dramatic improvement in writing is possible, I have found, when weak writers are made conscious of the ways that prediction and redundancy work in the reading process. Consider Weaver's description of a poor reader:

> The poor reader is often one who does not predict, does not anticipate what is coming next, but instead treats each word as if it existed in isolation.[8]

If weak readers do not predict, and if weak writers are usually also weak readers, then it follows that weak writers might benefit from instruction in predicting. Teaching the psycholinguistic notion of both prediction and redundancy helps make writers aware of audience in a very concrete sense. If that first audience, the audience called here "self-reader," begins to set expectations, then the concept of an outside reader's setting of expectations is graphically demonstrated. Writing becomes a transaction between writer and reader, just as reading is. Smith offers encouragement for such an idea when he briefly mentions (in language more tentative than it deserves) the

relationship between reading and writing:

> It may be from the perspective of predictions and intentions that one can best perceive the intimate relationship between readers and writers. It might be said that a book is comprehended (from the writer's point of view at least) when the reader's predictions mirror the writer's intentions at all levels.[9]

Once a writer becomes conscious of the fact that readers actively engage with a text, the writer realizes that his or her writing produces expectations in readers. As self-reader, and as self-editor, the writer becomes a conscious reader -- making predictions and searching for their confirmation. Let us now turn to a concrete illustration of the technique and effects of helping writers become more expert by leading them to become conscious readers.

A Demonstration

Proposition II: When ineffective writers are helped to become conscious of the interactive language process between writing and reading, their writing quickly becomes more expert.

At Queensborough Community College of the City University of New York, an urban two-year institution, I have been teaching students in my composition classes about prediction and redundancy in the reading process. Direct demonstrations rather than theoretical

discussions work best. We talk, first, about the word "prediction" which the students usually associate with horoscopes, fortune tellers, and the weather. Next, I introduce oral association games such as "If I mention _____, it makes you think about _____."

TEACHER	STUDENTS
crime	car theft, muggings
muggings	on the street
street crime	darkness, muggings, watch your wallet
dark street	fear, attacks
attack	not enough police

This procedure, and others that I present here, is intended to raise consciousness about what predicting is and how we all do it automatically. My goal is to externalize a simplified model of prediction in the reading process.

The next step is to apply prediction to writing. Cloze procedures can be adapted for this purpose. To create a classic cloze exercise, every fifth or seventh word in a piece of writing must be deleted and replaced with a blank line. Students are then asked to guess on the basis of context -- that is, to predict -- what word was deleted. When I adapt cloze procedures for my composition classes, I decide what letters or words to delete. I want the guessing to be easy, yet instructive of the principle. Later in a semester, I often use more traditional cloze procedures, especially if I find that the students need more rigorous exposure to forced, intelligent guessing. Here is an exercise I use early in the

semester; it is based on a passage by Phillip Wylie:

> What Amer_____ eat is handsomely _____; it is usually clean and _____; it is _____ preserved. The only _____ is this: year by year, it _____ less good to eat. It appeals increas_____ to the eye. But who eats with his _____?

As can be seen, redundancy is helping the reader guess the missing letters or words. In class, however, I do not use the word "redundancy" because it proves too confusing to students who know its pejorative connotation in English handbooks. On the other hand, I do not hesitate from the very start, as I explain above, to use the word "prediction."

All of this work is preparatory to application to actual writing. Students are soon asked to write a paragraph about, for example, crime in New York City. Here is what one weak writer, Roy, wrote (I have numbered the sentences to facilitate the discussion that follows):

> Draft 1
>
> (1) New York City is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. (2) It cannot be compared to other cities when it comes to crime. (3) Killings and beatings of our elderly citizens by teenagers in "the big apple" are the most hideous crimes committed. (4) Crime is on the rampage morning, noon, and night in New York City.

After circling rather widely, Roy got to the general topic of crime

in New York City. But the draft suffers from the writer's not being conscious of what a reader expects. (Other explanations for problems in Draft 1 are best saved for ancther occasion. As will be seen, many of these other problems disappear as the writer begins to concentrate on prediction and redundancy in action.)

How can a teacher make students conscious of what a reader expects? Not by talking about it, but by demonstrating it. Here the best resource is, of course, the other students in the class who serve as readers. We read together, line by line, as a class. Sentences are revealed one at a time. Thus, sentence one of Draft 1 is put on the board or shown on an overhead projector. The class of readers is asked what they expect will come next. What an eye-opener for the writer! Readers focus on the words "densely populated" and say that they expect to read about overcrowding and its effects on New York City. Some readers ask why the writer is not talking about crime, the subject of the assignment, but they accept what has been written and set their expectations accordingly.

Next, the second sentence is shown. The readers are amazed. Some of their comments:

> "Now that you've gotten to the topic, crime, I am not ready. I was on the population track."
>
> "Hey, you hardly said anything about New York City and now you're making comparisons. Go slow."
>
> "Where's the overpopulation you promised?"

Roy is listening very closely now. He realizes that he has taken

too long to get to the subject, but now that he has mentioned crime he is eager to show off his third sentence. Compliments are heard all around. While I recognize that some composition teachers might like to point out some structural problems in the third sentence, I am not tempted. My goal is to raise consciousness about the fact that language begets expectations about further language.

Because I want also to work at the word level, I ask the readers what they would likely have filled in if there had been a blank where the words "the big apple" appear. Most say that they would not fill in "the big apple" because it is a bit too merry for the rest of the paragraph; others like the try at using a synonym for New York City, even if it is not quite right. Later in the semester, I do more work at the word level, especially emphasizing diction.

When the readers are shown the fourth sentence of Draft 1, I tell them that it is the final sentence of the paragraph. Cries of disbelief ring out. Roy hears that the readers had expected more details, more about those muggings of the elderly. Now Roy is eager to try a rewrite.

An aside about the tactful use of student work is needed here. Never, ever, do I expose a student's writing to the class unless the student volunteers his or her work. In fact, at the start of the semester, I use anonymous drafts from a previous semester (and these, too, are only from students who have given me permission to

use their work.) I have always been fascinated to find that soon after the "prediction sessions" become part of the class routine students clamor for their work to be shown. They are eager for exposure to objective eyes, eager for their eyes to be opened, and eager to test their growing abilities as self-readers. The atmosphere during the prediction sessions is always one of mutual inquiry. Readers discover that they can be honest without being hostile.

Too, students other than the writer will often ask to do a rewrite of a draft just discussed. I always give permission. I find that students thirst to apply what they are coming to understand, and if they wish to base some of their work on someone else's beginning, I encourage the experiment. Most of the time, the original writer will then actively confer with anyone else who has tried a subsequent draft, with the result that intense private debates are not unusual before or after classes, outside of the formal setting for learning. This never fails to quicken my pulse. This collaborative learning has not been mandated by classroom management structures; rather, it has grown naturally out of students' desire to share and argue ideas.

Roy wrote a second draft of his paragraph. The assignment is still crime in New York City.

Draft 2

(1) Crime is in reality a serious problem in New York City. (2) Crime on the IRT subway has gotten out

> of hand lately. (3) At the Bronx end of the run, there are at least ten muggings daily. (4) Killings and beating of our elderly citizens by teenagers are cruel crimes indeed. (5) Old people are easily frightened. (6) The newspapers report that drug abuse in the South Jamaica section of Queens has increased sixty percent in the last six months. (7) Crime is on the rampage morning, noon, and night in New York City.

Again the members of the class serve as readers. Upon seeing sentence one, some readers ask what "in reality" means. Roy says that he used those words for emphasis, but the readers still think that the words are distracting. Always, the discussion focuses on the expectations that language elicits.

Everyone notes that this time Roy has the subject of the assignment in his first sentence -- the wide circling is no longer present in Roy's approach to the piece. On the basis of the first sentence, the readers predict that the second sentence will mention a specific crime. They are right. At the same time, many readers suggest that the connection between sentences one and two could be improved. As a result of earlier prediction sessions and assorted class activities, the students know now about words of transition. They have also become sensitive to unity in writing. Roy asks if "for example" would be a good way to start sentence two; the readers approve.

The third sentence is praised for logically following the second and for including specific details. The fourth sentence, however,

elicits objections. The readers are confused.

"Are you still on the subways?"

"If you had to switch so quickly away from subway crime (and I wish you hadn't) why didn't you help me get ready?"

"At least give me an 'also.'"

The discussion continues along these lines, with an emphasis not only on the content of each sentence but also on the connections among ideas. The seventh sentence, which is the same as the fourth sentence in Draft 1, gets some praise this time around. In fact, many readers suggest that it is a better sentence than sentence one. Although both are generalizations upon which the rest of the paragraph is built, the readers say that sentence seven catches more of the "spirit of crime." Roy now wants to try a third draft.

I spend some time talking with the class about alternative contents: in this case, whether to skim over many crimes or to limit the writing to one crime. Preferences are split, but the notion of alternatives starts to develop. Later in the semester, I will require practice with alternative contents, but now I care about more basic concerns.

Roy's third draft is more spirited:

Draft 3

(1) Crime is a reality that huants New York City night and day. (2) Do you want to take a subway from

Manhattan to the Bronx? (3) You'd better hold on tight to your purse or make sure that your wallet is not in your back pocket. (4) Muggers and pickpockets will be happy to relieve you of your money -- or even your life. (5) A favorite target of thieves is our elderly citizens as they ride the subway or walk the streets. (6) Old people are easy marks for cruel teenagers who like to beat and kill old people. (7) One reason for so much theft in New York City is drug abuse. (8) Junkies want their fix, but first they want our money. (9) The "big apple" has a worm in it.

Inspired by the reactions to his seventh sentence in Draft 2, Roy has become less stiff in sentence one of Draft 3. Indeed, the language of the entire paragraph is more natural. This shift to more natural language often happens after the class has discussed a few of a writer's drafts. Such a shift to natural language happens, I believe, because during prediction sessions the students speak openly in a relaxed manner. The stilted language of "school writing" stands in sharp contrast to the more natural language used while a piece of writing is being discussed. The writer, therefore, in able to rediscover his or her own language roots and thereby find a voice that rings true. To further encourage this bonus from prediction sessions, I urge writers to tape record the discussions to replay while they revise.

In talking about Draft 3, the readers clearly show that they enjoy the new tone in the piece. They also like the flow from one sentence to the next, though many readers challenge the suitability of sentence six. Roy particularly enjoys the good things he hears about his whimsical treatment of "the big apple," a holdover from Draft 1 that was dropped in Draft 2. He wanted to use those words, and now he had found a way that made them fit neatly into the mood of the paragraph.

Roy decides to try a new subject. While there are still problems in Draft 3, I decide not to dwell on them. The same or similar problems will reappear later, but for now the growth from Draft 1 to Draft 3 in only a week or ten days speaks for itself. The insights must now be applied and extended with a new beginning. Before I move the class away from Roy's work, I point out that the paragraphs have increased in length from four sentences to nine. I thus plant the seed for new awareness of the relationship between extended discourse (within limits) and ease of prediction. Slowly the habits of over-condensation, unclear connecting, and assuming of relationships will begin to disappear.

Prediction sessions such as those just described can also concentrate on helping a writer at the word level. For this purpose, the writer's paragraph can be subjected to a modified cloze procedure to control for whatever needs attention. Such a technique is effective when a writer has many problems with, for example, diction or verb forms. Further, prediction sessions can also be used to help readers

become conscious of needed connections between paragraphs.

Prediction and redundancy as they operate in the reading process are, of course, more complex cognitive activities than these teaching strategies might seem to suggest. But the simplification that comes with externalization helps writers become conscious readers, become effective self-readers -- and thus better writers. In fact, after "prediction sessions" of the sort just described, the externalized processes quickly become internalized. Then the interaction between writer and self-reader happens naturally.

As might be predicted, this focus on prediction and redundancy has an effect on the students' reading. Students who are stuck at the word-by-word point in reading soon begin to permit their natural abilities to use redundancy to be released. They suddenly look around more, skim now and then, and generally employ their sense of context to the fullest. In short, they bring more to the printed page and their comprehension improves. But I do not advocate using the strategies I describe here in a reading class; rather, I find that entry via the writing process is less threatening to weak readers who are already overly tense about their reading skills.

Summary

My purpose has been to draw upon two concepts, prediction and redundancy, in the psychoinguistic analysis of the reading process to argue that the acts of writing and reading are inextricably bound

to one another when a person writes. Writers can improve their writing when they become conscious readers, aware of the expectations they must fulfill for their readers. Writers can be helped to become conscious readers when teaching strategies are available that externalize the processes of prediction and redundancy.

Notes

[1] Frank Smith, Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p. 77

[2] Kenneth S. Goodman, "Psycholinguistic Universals in the Reading Process," in Psycholinguistics and Reading, ed. Frank Smith (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).

[3] Smith, Understanding Reading, pp. 66-67.

[4] Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning," College Composition and Communication, 28 (May 1977).

[5] Peter Elbow, Writing Without Teachers (New York: Oxford, 1973), p. 15.

[6] Barrett J. Mandel, "Losing One's Mind: Learning to Write and Edit," College Composition and Communication, 29 (December 1978).

[7] Linda Flower, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," College English, 41 (September 1979), p. 36.

[8] Constance Weaver, Grammar for Teachers: Perspectives and Definitions (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1979, p. 54.

[9] Smith, Understanding Reading, p. 171.